

Darling, Lay Your Bones

by alyseci5

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Summary: King's smarter than he looks, in theory. But even Abby could be forgiven for questioning his intelligence when he doesn't walk away from a fight with a guy twice his size and who he's already pissed off. Knowing King, that had probably been deliberate.

[Abby/King]

Darling, Lay Your Bones

****Author's Notes:**** Thanks to Aithine for beta reading duties. Any mistakes remaining are my own.

Written for laughlovelive713 on tumblr. Title from 'Oh, my love', by The Score.

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Maybe if Abby had been a better person, she'd have found it in her heart to pity King, not that King would want to be pitied. But she'd been told more than once that she had a hard heart, and maybe there was a point buried underneath all that 'it's for your own good, honey' bullshit she'd had to put up with in her teenage years.

No, King wouldn't take pity. He'd take sympathy - if he thought it would get him something, he was more than capable of playing the martyr " but he wouldn't take pity, not ever, and certainly not tonight.

So she didn't pity him. She wasn't even that sympathetic. He'd earned every single ache and pain he had right now, and most of them were self-inflicted.

No. If he wanted sympathy, he was barking up the wrong goddamned Nightstalker.

He was smarter than he looked, she ****knew**** that, and he was a hell

of a lot smarter than the rest of the Nightstalkers gave him credit for, but even she could be forgiven for starting to question whether he had two brain cells to rub together after tonight's little fiasco. Of all the stupid shit he'd pulled since Sommerfield had given him the cure, going one on one with Konstantin "who was even bigger than King and hell of a lot meaner" was right up there, especially when you factored in how much King had been pissing the man off recently.

Knowing King, that had probably been deliberate.

And maybe that was the problem - she ****did**** know King, knew him better than anyone else. Sometimes she thought she knew him better than she knew herself. He might fire off quips the way that the rest of them fired off bullets, but he had the balls to back up that bravado, and he wasn't the kind to walk away from a fight. It was probably the only reason he'd survived Danica Talos, that and sheer goddamned stubbornness.

She should have seen this coming. It wasn't like King hadn't been telegraphing his dislike of Konstantin for weeks, and she sure as hell knew it was mutual. She'd just thought that King was smart enough not to let it get physical and it ****sucked**** to be wrong.

She glared at King's back as he rummaged in the fridge, knowing she was being irrational and not giving a shit anyway. Not that King would notice, or pay much attention if he did. He'd grown used to her moods. On the one hand, she was kind of glad that he didn't take offence or grow silent and watchful when she was pissed, because that meant he didn't put her in the same category as Talos, but on the other hand

Sometimes she really wished she had the ability to strike the fear of God into him. Or at least the fear of her.

"Are we sure that man's human?" King asked as he finally pulled his head out of the fridge and started to limp his way back towards the sofa she'd settled herself on, clutching an ice pack in one hand. When he finally sat himself down next to her, he made a production of it, so much so that he landed heavily enough to bounce her on the springs. She glared at him again as he pressed the ice pack firmly over his swollen eye, blinking at her with the other one. "I mean, he's not like, some super soldier hopped up on serum or a robotic killing machine from the future, is he?"

The glares weren't working. She switched to giving him a jaundiced look instead, knowing in her heart of hearts that even that wouldn't stop him. Maybe it was time to pull out the big guns, start issuing the kind of threat that would get even King sitting up and paying attention. "I'm confiscating your comic book collection."

That worked. He straightened up and blinked at her again, looking faintly ludicrous when one eye was still covered by the ice pack, and then his gaze flitted across her face, as though he was trying to figure out whether she was serious or not.

She was. As serious as a goddamned heart attack.

King was smart enough to get that, at least. He settled back against the cushions and studied her for a moment, obviously considering his

options. It wasn't a surprise that he went with a pout. Smart but usually predictable.

"They're graphic novels and why? Just because I threw the theory out that he might be a serum-induced super soldier?"

Pouting didn't suit him. She much preferred the sarcastic asshole version. At least that was honest.

"Robotic killing machine from the future?" she asked, putting as much sarcasm into her voice as he would have done, and he snorted, pulling the ice pack away from his face long enough to glare at her with both eyes. Not that he could pull it off - he could never pull glares off, not with her. He was far too amused with himself most of the time to make them believable.

At least on the surface. She'd seen him with vamps often enough to see past the surface amusement to the bone-deep rage simmering underneath. It was a pity he hadn't managed to summon up more of that same rage for Konstantin, given how focused the guy had been on kicking King's ass by the time that Abby had walked in on them. But King had kept calm, taking his punches with the kind of stubborn determination that she'd come to expect, and throwing more than one of his own.

The memory made her twitch, her anger starting to stir again, only this time King wasn't the target. Yeah, King could be an ass - she was under no illusions about that - but he was a Nightstalker, just like the rest of them. He'd more than earned his place with them, in blood and in pain, and fuck Konstantin if he couldn't, or wouldn't, see that.

But her anger with Konstantin still didn't mean she had much sympathy for King. Konstantin had probably thrown the first punch, but King would have known it was coming. Known - and for reasons of his own, however fucked up they were - hadn't ducked.

King nudged her foot with his boot, dragging her attention back where he probably thought it belonged - on him. His eye was red and a little bloodshot now, and the skin along his cheekbone was puffy and sore, giving him the air of a slightly disreputable kicked puppy. She resisted the urge to reach up and poke at it, just to make him flinch. It would serve him right. She got that he hadn't found it easy to find his place with them, but it hadn't been all roses for her either. With the exception of Sommerfield, and maybe Dex on his best days, the rest of their little band still saw her as the illegitimate daughter of the great Abraham Whistler, who'd had her place handed to her instead of earning it on her own.

She'd have said 'fuck King' for making it harder for her, if she hadn't made it harder all on her own. Mostly by fucking King.

Maybe King wasn't the only one with a self-destructive streak.

"You wouldn't really confiscate my graphic novels, would you?" King asked, aiming for pathetic and hitting it dead on. "I mean, most... some of them are actually legitimate research materials."

"Comics," she corrected automatically, just so he'd give her a wounded look, all soul and insincerity. "Yes, I would, and what? You

mean the ones about Dracula?" She snorted, matching him sound for sound. "You think that shit's actually useful?"

"I think a lot of things," he said, sounding far too smug for someone who'd just had the shit kicked out of him.

"I haven't seen much evidence of that."

There was more bite in her words than she'd intended, and he gave her a sharp look, the expression on his face turning assessing. It sent a little flurry of guilt through her; for someone who hid behind words the way he did, he saw a hell of a lot without ever admitting that he was paying attention, and she knew damned well which bloodsucking bitch was responsible for that.

"Well," he said slowly, drawing the word out as his eyes continued to scan her face, studying her in a way that still made her want to shuffle, shamefacedly, in her seat. She kept perfectly still in spite of it. "I never said the things I thought were good things. Or smart."

It was such an echo of what she was already thinking that she sighed, consciously focusing on letting the tension drain out of her, and not just because of the pressure building up behind her eyes. "You're smarter than you look," she said quietly. And then, because he smiled, small and pleased before he let it morph into something wide and smug, she added, "Not that it's difficult."

That made him laugh, low and soft, just like she'd intended, at least until his sore ribs protested. He winced, not bothering to hide it, and, okay, maybe she felt a little sympathy at that. The little sympathy she did have, however, vanished again when he shifted in his seat, obviously trying to get comfortable but crowding her against the arm of the sofa anyway. She didn't know why - there was plenty of room on his other side - and she sighed again, shooting him a little 'really?' look that he ignored.

He was good at that, ignoring the warning signs. Sometimes she was convinced he did it deliberately, even if he hadn't been anywhere near as good at ignoring Konstantin. And he was a little too good at pushing people's buttons, hers included.

He shifted again, leaning in towards her. She cottoned on to what he was up to a little too late, and by the time she had, his head was already in her lap.

"What are you doing?"

"Stretching out." His eyes were closed, but she didn't need to see them to picture the look in them as he smirked up in her general direction. "It's good for my ribs."

For a second she seriously considered punching him in those same ribs, just to watch his certainty evaporate, but then his smirk softened into a smile and he opened his eyes fractionally, just enough to see her from under his lids.

"You're a much more comfortable pillow than I expected, Whistler. Somehow I thought you'd be all..." He raised his fingers from where they were resting on his stomach and wagged them vaguely in the air.

"Hard and muscular."

This time she did poke him in the ribs, and he folded up, spluttering slightly. She'd have felt better if it had been from pain, instead of, she suspected, laughter. Maybe.

"You're a mess," she said when he eventually subsided, his head settling firmly in her lap again as he squinted up at her.

"Yeah, but you should see the other guy," he said, grinning up at her, completely unrepentant. She glared down at him, but he wasn't fooled; his grin simply widened, at least until his lip split again and he winced, bringing his fingers up to poke at it gingerly.

"You'll make it worse," she warned, not that it would stop King. Some days she felt like she spent her life telling him not to poke at hornets' nests, only for him to do it anyway.

Served him right if he got stung every once in a while. But maybe not this much.

No, definitely not this much.

"And I did see the other guy," she added quietly. "He had four inches, fifty, sixty pounds on you, and a vicious temper. What the hell were you thinking?"

"Four inches sounds about right." Abby rolled her eyes, not amused and King's fingers finally moved away from his lip as he shifted, his head pressing more firmly into her lap as he tilted it back to look up at her. He wasn't grinning any longer; if anything he looked tired, maybe even a little more sore than he was willing to let on, as if Konstantin had hit harder than she'd thought. But his brow was furrowed thoughtfully as he studied her face for a moment.

"I can look after myself," he said eventually, but there wasn't any irritation in his face, no wounded male pride the way she was used to from others. "Besides, he can't even hit like a girl."

She rolled her eyes again, shifting herself as she got ready to push his ass off the couch. When King was in this mood, he brought the worst out in her.

"No, no, hear me out." He summoned up another grin for her, one that was a little too bright around the edges to be entirely real. She hadn't missed that he was pointedly ignoring the frown on her face and the irritation snapping in her eyes. "I do actually speak from personal experience on that one. I'm pretty sure Danica hits harder. She sure as hell kicks a lot harder than he does, although if we could get him into the kind of heels she likes wearing he might actually manage to do some damage. And there's a scarring mental image for you."

"Funny," she said drily, ignoring the amused smile he flashed at her before even that faded from his face. He went back to studying her, and for once she had no idea what was going through his mind.

"All joking aside, I knew what I was getting into, okay? And I can take my punches, believe me."

She did. She'd seen him take enough punches by now to have seen that, including a few she'd thrown herself back in the early days, when he was first de-vamped.

But that was a hell of a long time ago, at least measured in Nightstalker years. What had King said about them being like dog years? Something stupid but edging into witty.

King had gone back to poking at his injuries, and she watched him silently as he ran his tongue along the inside of his cheek, wincing again when he hit a sore patch. It was probably a sign that she was beyond salvation that she actually found chipmunk impersonation endearing instead of having it irritate the hell out of her.

"You sure you're okay?" she asked quietly, and he pulled a face, something half-way between a frown and a wince.

"I'll live," he said. "It was mostly my pride that got hurt. Okay, maybe my ribs, too." He widened his eyes at her, an open invitation to join in his self-deprecation. "But thankfully â€" and this has been pointed out to me more than once, several of those times by you, I hasten to add â€" I have a hard head."

"Maybe, but you need to stop picking fights with people who are twice your size. Or at least stop goading them to the point where they punch you."

A flash of guilt flitted across his face, and his eyes darted away from hers for a moment before he met her eyes again, his full of the kind of studied innocence that didn't fool her for a second. It took a second for her to put it all together, the hints and the little bits and pieces that had slowly been filtering through her subconscious since the moment she'd walked in on the pair of them brawling, and since she and Dex had had to drag them apart.

It wasn't the picture she'd expected, and it wasn't a pretty one.

"You threw the first punch."

He winced again, but she didn't think that had anything to do with pain, not physical pain at least.

"Jesus Christ, King. What the hell were you â€"?"

"What was I thinking?" There was a slight edge in his voice as he cut her off in her tracks, but it disappeared again almost as soon as it appeared and his smile had fewer teeth than it had started with. Maybe that was because of the way she was looking at him, unable to completely hide her disappointment, or maybe he just had reasons of his own. "I thought we'd already established that thinking wasn't my strong point."

"You should haveâ€"|"

"What, turned the other cheek? I'm pretty sure he got both of them." He snorted, his eyes drifting shut as he shuffled around, making himself comfortable, like they were just shooting the breeze instead of talking about his death wish. "I'm sorry, but are you actually

trying to take the moral high ground on this one, Whistler? Seriously? With the shit you've pulled? Remind me again - how big were those two goons last week?"

"That's different."

"Uh huh."

"They were â€"

"They had at least fifty pounds on you, Whistler. Each. So, you knowâ€|" He flexed his fingers again, miming an explosion this time. "Moral high ground, pooft!"

She probably should have kicked his ass for that, and maybe she would have done if he hadn't had a point. Or if Konstantin hadn't got there first. "That's different," she repeated, as stubborn in her way as he was. "They're the guys we're ****supposed**** to fight, King. They're not â€"

"On our side?" There was a bright, bitter tone in his voice she hadn't heard for months, not since the early days, back when he'd first been fang free and clean shaven. It wasn't any easier to hear now than it had been then, dealing with an angry, scared and psychologically scarred man who expected them to kill him at any moment.

The underlying guilt wasn't anything new either.

"I know Konstantin's an ass â€"

"Konstantin's going to get us killed, you do realise that, right?"

"So, that's why you punched him? Because you think he's going to get us killed?"

King glared up at her, and this time there was a little heat in the look, mostly, she thought, down to frustration. He'd never liked being backed into a corner, and the harder she pushed, the closer he came to spilling his guts.

He'd survived Danica. For five long goddamned years, he'd stood his ground or, if not stood it, made sure that every inch she'd beaten him back had to be earned in blood. And then made sure that the very next day he'd been right back where he'd started, a war of attrition that Danica had never had a chance of winning. Not that Talos sounded smart enough to realise that.

But Abby? Oh, she'd realised really early on that King gave ground to her. He gave her everything she wanted. All she'd ever had to do was ask.

She just had to pick the right question, the one he couldn't wriggle away from.

"Why did you punch him?"

"Because he was asking for it, okay. I mean, the man just has one of those punchable faces, and I speak as someone who pretty much falls

in the same general category."

"Kingâ€|"

She let her voice trail off, putting just enough disappointment in it to make him squirm.

"The man's got no respect."

The accent was fake, the kind of bad Godfather impression that only King could hope to get away with, but underneath that she thought that maybe the answer was genuine.

"You punched him because he disrespected you?" It sounded even stupider when she said it out loud like that, the kind of macho bullshit she'd never expected from King. She'd thought he was better than that.

It was only when King almost, but didn't quite, roll his eyes at her that she finally caught a clue.

"He disrespected me?" Her voice rose slightly as she fought, and failed, to hold back the frustration. She'd worked so goddamned hard to be taken seriously, and King had just punched someone in the face for, what? Talking shit about her? "You think I need you to fight my battles for me?"

"Hey! You know the deal."

"And what deal would that be?"

"Someone insults you in front of me, I punch them in the goddamned face. And if someone insults me in front of youâ€| you admit that they have a point. Because, let's face it, they probably do."

"I kneed Konstantin in the goddamned balls for you."

"You did?" King looked absurdly pleased by that. "How the hell did I miss that?"

"Maybe because Dex was holding you back and trying not to get your blood on his shirt."

He pulled a face at that, but he didn't argue, not the way that he could have done. And it wasn't just because she had a point â€" logic had never stopped King in the past and she wasn't sure why it would now either.

"Look," he said eventually, his tone slightly more appeasing. "If he'd talked shit about Sommerfield or about Anderson, I'd probably still have punched him in his frankly stupid looking face. I just don't like the guy. I'm big enough to admit that. And talking about youâ€| well, he crossed the line. He's just lucky I let him walk away at all."

And yet King was the one with the rapidly darkening eye. But his mention of Sommerfield and Anderson confirmed her suspicions about the kind of thing that Konstantin must have been saying. She was so goddamned tired of dealing with that kind of bullshit.

"He said something about us sleeping together," she said, making it a statement, not a question.

King pulled another face. "I don't remember much sleeping being involved," he said, and she could see the exact moment he decided to go with a joke. She didn't give any ground, simply looking at him, and eventually he sighed, giving in. "Yeah," he admitted. "It might have been along those grounds. Look, Abby â€"

"I can fight my own battles," she repeated, the words falling from her lips automatically. But there was no heat in them, not this time.

The look he gave her this time was serious, no sign of the joker with whom she was only too familiar. "I know you can, honey." The endearment caught her off guard, almost as much as his next words. "But you shouldn't have to fight them all on your own, and that was one fight he didn't pick with you. Or hadn't you noticed that he made sure you weren't around when he said it? I don't know why. Maybe he was afraid you'd knee him in the balls or something."

He widened his eyes at her, his standard invitation for her to join him in his joke and, after a second, she gave a little ground herself, snorting out something that might have been next door to a laugh. Maybe.

He took it as encouragement, but luckily for her sanity he stayed at least marginally serious. For the moment.

"Konstantin's a semen-stained festering fuckface with deep-seated mommy issues, but there's a script to these things. You know that as well as I do â€" probably more, right?" He didn't wait for her to nod. "He's got no respect, and if I don't punch him in the face for saying shit like that, it means I don't have any respect for you either. And I do. I mean, yeah, you're hot as hell, butâ€|"

She raised an eyebrow at him, and his expression twisted for a moment as he looked for the right words. "Look, if he ever says that shit in front of you, I'll hold your coat while you kick his ass, and frankly you'd probably do it better than me. But if you're not around, believe me when I tell you that I'm going to start with breaking his nose and move on from there. And take great pleasure in doing it."

She gave him a long, steady look, but he met it calmly, his expression never wavering. He meant it, she realised. King, who was never serious about anything, was serious about this.

It shouldn't have sent a flood of warmth through her chest, but it did. And unlike King, she knew when she was beaten.

"My hero," she said eventually, shading her words with the kind of sarcasm he'd appreciate. But the tone didn't mean that the core of what she was saying wasn't solid and real.

King knew damned well that he'd won this round. He gave her another grin, something that stayed just the right side of smug, and settled back down. He looked like he belonged there, stretched out along the battered and faded couch with his head pillowed in her lap, as though, in spite of the cramped couch and the fact that her lap

wasn't the softest, he was comfortable.

The sight sent a slow tide of ****something**** through her, something that she didn't want to examine too closely but that lingered, high and tight, in her chest. She reached out to brush the hair from his forehead, unable to resist touching him, lost as she was in something that felt perilously close to tenderness.

King closed his eyes and sighed, the sound soft and pleased as he relaxed into her touch. She smiled down at him even though he couldn't see it, amused in spite of herself at his reaction, finally sliding her fingers into his hair and scratching lightly at his scalp. He came close to purring, all six foot two and two hundred pounds of him melting into her touch.

That wave of tenderness surged through her again, something so bittersweet that it made her heart ache. A bruise was already starting to darken along his jawline, and there were dark circles under his eyes, one of which she knew would turn green, purple and yellow over the next few days. He was going to hurt, be stiff and sore for days. She knew that from bitter experience and her own brushes with those who never pulled their punches.

And he'd taken every single lick for her. Macho bullshit as that was, she was oddly touched. And in spite of the bruises, the aches and pains, she couldn't remember the last time she'd seen him this at ease. Maybe not ever.

"He really did a number on you, didn't he?"

"Totally worth it."

He sounded like he meant it, and she shouldn't have enjoyed hearing it as much as she did, sharp pleasure mixed with a fierce kind of pride.

"Next time call for back up," she said, because even smart people could be stupid sometimes, and King was a case in point.

King let out a soft hum of acknowledgement, his eyes drifting closed again, but he stayed quiet, as though her fingers had pulled all of his words out of him, for once leaving him with nothing to say. That wave of something like tenderness came again, and she smoothed down his hair, leaving her palm, warm and solid, against the curve of his skull.

"He hurt you," she said, not even knowing she was going to speak until the words were out there, hanging in the air between them, filled with the same kind of fierce tenderness she felt. "He doesn't get to do it again."

King opened his eyes, meeting hers with the kind of frank appraisal she was growing used to from him. "Okay, I will. In fact, maybe next time I ****will**** just stand back let you kick Konstantin's ass. Or at least give you a turn. I'd hate to deprive you of the satisfaction, honey."

And there was that word again.

"That's probably the smart idea."

"See? I do have them occasionally."

"Occasionally," she admitted, stroking her thumb along King's hairline. He let out another soft sigh, and her heart clenched, for once with the right kind of pain.

King shifted again, making himself comfortable, and she let him, feeling the last of his tension leaching out of him as his breathing started to even out.

"Hey, Whistler," he murmured, and she stilled her fingers, tilting her head to hear him better. "I kind of like the whole sleeping together thing. Totally worth getting my ass kicked for."

She huffed out a laugh, something quiet but enough to let him know she'd heard. "I thought it didn't involve actually sleeping?"

"Hmm" He rolled over until his cheek was pressed against her leg, curling his own legs up to fit better on the couch. It should have looked ridiculous, and it did, kind of, but she still settled her hand back in his hair, soft and soothing. "Think that's about to change."

That was okay. Maybe it was time.

"My hero," she said again, more affection in her voice this time than sarcasm. But if King heard her, he didn't acknowledge it, his breathing now deep and regular.

That was okay, too. But if he started to drool, she really was pushing him off her onto the floor.

Probably.

the end

End
file.